14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

she may call herself 'a woman who has just given birth to a child' for months afterwards, and try to solicit privileges on that account. 846

Nuer mothers love their babies and try to do all they can in their limited way for them. Whatever the child may lack, it does not lack its mother's love while she is living. But if the mother dies life is a different thing for the child that is left. A new-born baby demands food, and the artificial feeding of babies is an art entirely unknown to the Nuer. What to do with the small piece of humanity is a serious proposition. 854

Rumour says that they may bury the new-born baby with the dead mother, arguing that it will die soon anyhow, but I do not know of any authentic case where the live child has been buried. It is, however, very true that the motherless baby soon follows its mother. Five motherless infants have been brought to the mission at Nasser, as the people know that the art of the artificial feeding of infants is not unknown there. Two of these babies died, while three have lived so far. 847 165

TWINS

Twins are not uncommon, but are usually a cause of distress to their parents, for they are sure that one will die—and it usually does fail to survive. The mother always nurses one child at one breast and the second child at the other breast, and thus divides the supply of food as evenly as she can between them. 845 [853]

When a man is the father of twins, his brother will sacrifice a sheep before he eats with him so that no harm may come to the babies.

The Nuer has a superstition in regard to the burial of new-born twins. Rumour says that they prefer to tie the hands together and hang them up in a tree rather than 766 ●

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

766 bury them in the ground. I have never seen this done, nor have I known a case of new-born twins both dying.

795 I have heard in rather an indefinite way of triplets, but know of no authentic case.

One Nuer told me an almost unbelievable tale. I have tried to verify it from time to time, but have not been able to verify the main part of the story.

His story is as follows:—

A woman in a certain village gave birth to six babies at one time. She and her husband were much distressed as to what they should do to feed them. They finally decided that she could nurse two of them, but could devise no plan for feeding the others. So they decided to keep the two largest, healthiest-looking babies, and they took the other four babies, put them in a baby-basket together, and carried them to the forest which was about one and one-half miles away. They hung the basket up in a tree and left the four living babies—uncovered—in it. Then they returned to their village. The two babies they kept are well, strong children now, and are well cared for. My informant declares this to be true.

In my efforts to verify this tale I have found the name of the village, the name of the mother, the fact that they have 'twin' children the age that the two they kept should be, to be true as given by my informant. But I have not been able to verify his statement that she gave birth to six children.

Is the story a fabrication, or is it true and they are afraid to have it known to a white person? It is easy for a Nuer to say 'No' or 'I do not know', regardless of the facts, if he is afraid to give some information, or does not want to. They know that we would not approve of their method of solving their problem, although any one who knows the Nuer and his limited resources could easily realize what a serious problem the birth of six babies would be to them.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

Chapter Seven

SOME NOTES ON RELIGION, SUPERSTITIONS, AND MORAL LAW

NUER GODS

776 THE Nuer has long feared and worshipped he knows not what. There are various gods, Deng, Wiu, Cwol, and others. Some have power over rain, some over crops, disease, death, or lightning.

778 825 Some animals are considered sacred, but what is sacred to one man is not necessarily held sacred by another. It may be the crocodile, or the land crocodile, or a certain kind of snake. Every Nuer is certain to have a sacred animal which he will neither kill nor eat.

782 Sheep and cattle are sacrificed on various grounds in order to appease one god or another.

[776] 766 When a person is struck by lightning and killed he is said to have been taken by the god of lightning—Cwol. His body is laid upon a rack that is made in his house or barn and then covered entirely—over, under, and on all sides—with wood, ash, and soil. The door of the house is closed and the house is left desolate except for its silent owner. A person who has been struck and killed by lightning is never buried in the ground as others are.

784 No one will touch a person who has been stunned by lightning until he regains consciousness, for fear the god in him may be transmitted by contact.

778 A Nuer always considers the relatives of one who has been killed by lightning as sacred.

[826] [784] Any one who has some physical or mental deformity may be considered as having a god in him and be regarded as sacred and avoided for that reason.

781 The Nuer worship is a worship of fear. The missionary feels as if he were living in Old Testament times, and

SPIRITS OF THE ABOVE

×776 821 782 Come to earth gently, do not come with fury to thy grass [the thatched roof]. Come gently to thy grass. No one disputes with thee. It is thy universe. It is thy will, thine alone.' Or a man may take a mallet, used for driving tethering-pegs into the ground, lay it in the doorway to his byre, and, after asking God to 'rain well' for it is his universe, throw some ashes into the air in offering. Once when after a heavy storm I told a Nuer that should there be another storm of like severity I would desert my tent and take shelter in his byre he rebuked me, saying 'God does not wish the thunder to come like that again. You should not suggest it.'

×776 761 ●766 When a person is killed by lightning Nuer are resigned. They say that God has struck him with his fire and that as God has taken him there is nothing to be said. God has taken the soul of the man to himself and 'he would be angry if he saw you grieving for the person whom he has taken'. The death is not a punishment for some fault but a mysterious act of divine will, almost what some theologians call an election. All death is ultimately attributed to God, but only in the sense of his being the first and necessary cause which operates through secondary and contingent causes. In the case of a *colwic*, however, God has chosen a particular person for himself and taken him with his own hand. Nuer say that the chosen person has entered into kinship, or friendship, with God.[1] For this reason a person struck by lightning does not receive an ordinary burial and the usual mortuary rites are not held for him. I was under the impression, and have elsewhere stated, that, nevertheless, the formal rules of mourning were observed, but Dr. Mary Smith tells me that this is not so, and what she says is more in accordance with what I have recorded above.[2]

×776 766

A person is usually struck in his byre or hut and the walls of the burnt-out building are broken down over the body, and the

[1] In a published note on *colwic* (*Man*, 1949) I have translated a phrase, *'ca mar e kwoth'* by 'he has been brought into kinship with God'. As written it could mean this, but I now think that I may not have heard the words correctly and that what was said should be translated 'he was struck by God (with lightning)'. However, the idea of kinship, or friendship, with God was also expressed where the context allowed no room for misunderstanding.

[2] We find the same idea among the Shilluk. They do not bury or mourn a person killed by lightning. The death is an honour and the family feel that they have made an offering and will therefore prosper (the Rev. D. S. Oyler, 'Shilluk Notes', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1926, pp. 58–59). Dr. Lienhardt tells me that the Dinka also do not mourn a person killed by lightning.

charred remains of the rafters, supports, and thatch are heaped on top of them. If a man is struck in the bush his body is covered with grass and thornwood. Nuer say that it is only the *ring*, the flesh, which they cover up. The *yiegh*, the life, or in this sense the soul, has been taken by God and has become part of him. Sacrifices must be made at once. The people sacrifice to God even if a byre or hut is struck without causing death because the misfortune, being a direct intervention of God in human affairs, is a danger which must be got rid of. They say *'ba luɗk kier ka del'*, 'the byre is expiated with one of the flock'.[1] If a person is killed, his kith and kin feel that they are in grave danger and anyone closely connected with the dead makes sacrifice as soon as he hears of the calamity. The dead man's paternal and maternal kin and his affines bring oxen and sheep and goats to the mortuary mound and sacrifice them there. Even distant kinsmen and unrelated friends and neighbours make sacrifice; and if a girl is killed by lightning her sweetheart will sacrifice an animal. The whole community is involved, and fellow villagers who do not feel that they are sufficiently connected with the dead for animal sacrifice to be necessary throw leaves of the tobacco plant on the mound in silence. It is believed that unless sacrifices are made at once the *colwic* may return bringing death to man and beast. Also, the close kinsmen of the dead are so unclean that relatives and neighbours may not eat or drink in their homes before they have sacrificed; animals must follow the dead before the people can rest in peace. Nuer say *'ca je kir ka det kene rueth'*, 'he (the dead man) was expiated with some of the flock (goats and sheep) and oxen'. The sacrifices cleanse the kith and kin and ward off from them further misfortune.[2]

But only immediate danger is warded off by these sacrifices. The kin are not yet free from the ordinary contamination of death and they will not be till another ceremony has been performed some weeks or months later. This ceremony resembles the usual *cuol woc* mortuary ceremony held for a person who has died in some other way than by lightning and which I describe later, but Nuer do not call it by that name. Indeed they say, as I have

[1] *Del* means both 'sheep' and 'goat'.

[2] Dr. R. G. Lienhardt tells me that an ox must be sacrificed on the evening after the death, just before sunset, and that its flesh must be consumed during the night, a rule which obtains for sacrifice only on this occasion. This is perhaps a further association of *colwic* with darkness.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

mentioned, that one does not hold a mortuary ceremony for a *colwic*. The difference between an ordinary mortuary ceremony and a ceremony to commemorate a *colwic* would appear to be that whereas in both one purpose of sacrifice is to cleanse the living, another purpose in an ordinary mortuary ceremony, to send the soul of the dead to the ghosts, is lacking in the commemoration ceremony for a *colwic*. The soul of a man killed by lightning is at the moment of death translated to its heavenly home. Nevertheless, it may be that this ceremony is performed not only to cleanse the living and to commemorate the dead but also to fix his soul firmly in the above so that there will be no return to the living, just as an ordinary mortuary ceremony fixes the soul in the underworld of the ghosts.

I had the opportunity in 1936 to witness this ceremony when it was held for a girl called Nyakewa, the daughter of Rwacar, among the western Nuer. During the afternoon the women of the village collected in the garden of the dead girl's home to make beer, for it is the custom on this occasion for the women to work together instead of each in her own home. While they were engaged in making beer rain began to fall and wood ash[1] was thrown into the air and Nyakewa was addressed: 'Sister, wouldst thou spoil our work in this way? It is for thee we do it.' The rain soon passed over, though the sky remained overclouded for the rest of the day. Nuer expect rain to fall on this day, but after they have sacrificed. They say 'we have slaughtered cattle for God. The chyme (*wau*) will be watered today by God, and the blood also.'

The ceremony began in the late afternoon in the homestead where Nyakewa was killed, that of her mother Nyaruithni and of her brother Malith, an uninitiated boy. Her *pater*—she had been begotten in adultery by another man during his lifetime—was dead. The ceremony was held in her mother's home and not in her husband's home because, although bridewealth had been paid for her, she had not passed through the consummation ceremony before she was struck by lightning. A fully married woman who is killed by lightning becomes a *colwic* of her husband's lineage and not of her father's lineage. Her husband is *gwande*, her owner or master, and they say of such a spirit that she was married with cattle and will not return to her father's lineage—that is, will not

[1] The ash of women's cooking fires, not the ash of cattle-dung of the men's fires of byre and kraal.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

be its patron. I have noted that when a widow is killed by lightning at the home of a man with whom she cohabited after her husband's death her memorial is erected at her husband's home, though his people invite her lover to attend the commemoration ceremony.

Lat, son of Pan, the master of ceremonies (pp. 287–9) of Nyakewa's father's family, made fire ritually with firesticks and from it were lighted the various fires on which pots were placed for boiling the beer. The mud supports for the pots were made on the spot, for one does not use old utensils on these occasions. Since the ceremony was for a woman a new mud windscreen was constructed. The master of ceremonies then erected a *riek*, a shrine-stake, in the centre of the funeral mound and planted at the side of the mound a sapling of the *nyuot* tree. Such a mound and stake are shown in Mr. Corfield's photograph in Plate II.[1] The *nyuot* tree is, as we have noted, associated with the spirit *col* and also with rain and with the sky from which rain and lightning come and to which the soul of the dead person has gone. When planted in the rains the sapling generally takes root. If it dies they plant another. Many of the trees one sees in Nuer villages have been planted in this manner.

Shortly before sunset a procession of about twenty men arrived bearing in their hands leaves of the tobacco plant and heads of millet. They threw down these offerings near the mound with the freshly erected shrine-stake in the centre of it. No one comes to the place of sacrifice empty-handed. The procession was headed by the master of ceremonies leading a black ox, *a thak ma col*. It should preferably be a black one. This *ma col* sacrificial victim, *col* the spirit of lightning, and the *colwic* make a harmony of darkness (*col*), the darkness of storm. Before the ox was sacrificed men came from all directions leading oxen and castrated he-goats and wethers. The father of the dead girl's husband brought an ox, as did one of her maternal uncles. Among those who brought he-goats and wethers were the girl's mother, one of her maternal aunts, one of her maternal uncles, several of her father's kinsmen, and the man who had begotten her brother in adulterous congress

[1] This is almost certainly a *colwic* shrine, but it is more elaborate than most and the offerings of tobacco seen at the base would not be seen at shrines in other parts of Nuerland. The photograph was taken among the eastern Jikany Nuer who border the Anuak, great cultivators of tobacco.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

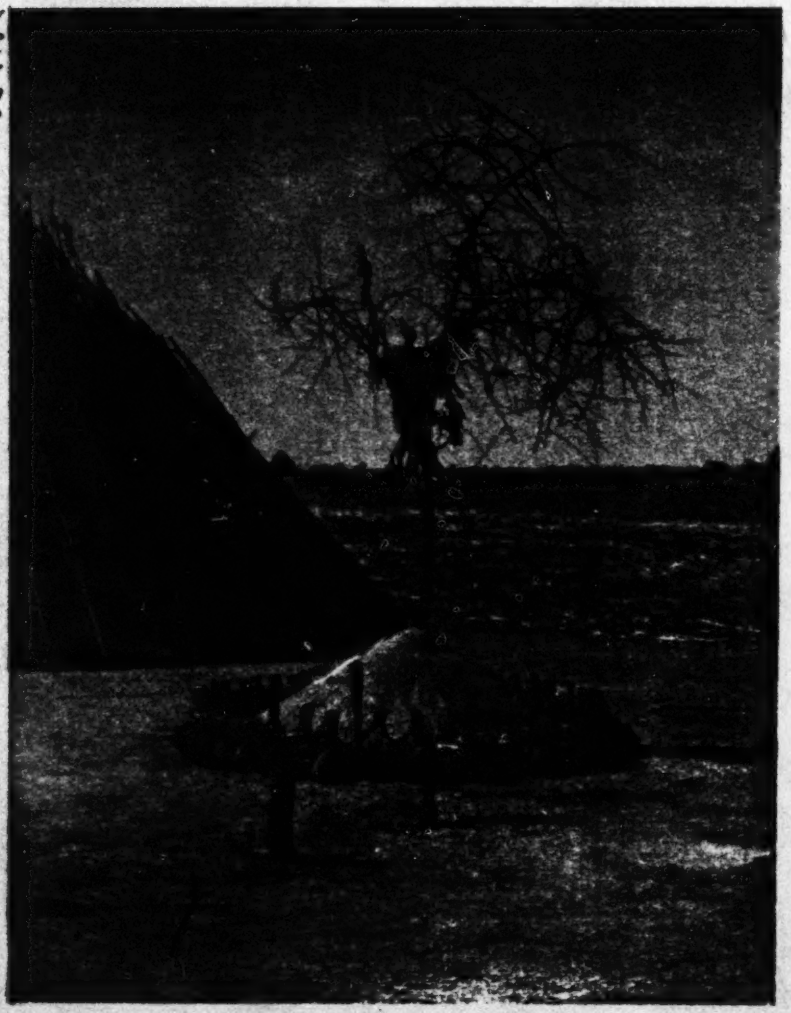
with her mother, for her brother had also been begotten in adultery, though by a different man from the man who begat her. The black ox was speared near the funeral mound and the other oxen and the sheep and goats were speared immediately afterwards. I have not known sheep and goats to be speared in any other sacrifices. The usual mode of sacrifice for them is by cutting the throat. Dr. Mary Smith tells me that they are speared on this occasion to symbolize the instantaneous death of a *colwic* by lightning. As soon as a goat or sheep fell it was cut in half through the belly. The oxen were also cut up unskinned, for one does not use the hides of animals sacrificed for a *colwic*, as one uses those of most sacrificial beasts, for sleeping on or for women's skirts. The head, hooves, some of the entrails, and part of the skin of the black ox were placed at the foot of the stake or hung on it. The chyme of the animals was collected and placed at the foot of the stake, and their tethering-cords were hung on it. Most of the flesh of the black ox went to the girl's father's lineage, on whose behalf it was sacrificed, but some went to collateral lineages, some to women of the father's lineage married to men of other lineages, and some to the girl's maternal uncles. I did not inquire how the other animals were divided but it may, I think, be assumed that in each case the animal was mostly consumed by the paternal kinsmen of the man who brought it to the sacrifice.

At dawn on the following morning the dead girl's senior maternal uncle sacrificed a bull on behalf of the maternal kinsfolk. It was first castrated in his byre because animals are not sacrificed entire. The uncle made a short invocation before spearing it. The meat of this animal was divided between the dead girl's own family, her maternal uncles, and various other relatives on the mother's side who were present. A man representing the mother then sacrificed an ox at the mound on behalf of the family. However the flesh of these sacrificed oxen may be divided according to rights of kinship, all present must receive pieces of meat, even though they be unrelated persons, because all must taste the meats of sacrifce to show the *colwic* that they do not reject or disregard (*cany*) it. The last sacrifice I witnessed was of a goat by a brother of the husband of the dead girl's mother's sister, on behalf of this maternal aunt; but I was told that more sheep and goats were slaughtered on subsequent days and that in all more than twenty animals were sacrificed. These were in addition to

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

PLATE II

x 776
●766
778



Shrine for person struck by lightning

[facing p. 58

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

those which had been killed immediately after Nyakewa had been struck by lightning. As the husband of one of Nyakewa's maternal aunts was killed at the same moment as herself while he was on a visit to her village many animals of the village had also to be sacrificed on his behalf in his own village. The flocks of the village were so depleted that there was no suitable beast available for sacrifice in a case of serious sickness which occurred in the village shortly afterwards (p. 35). The number of beasts sacrificed is an indication both of the seriousness of the event which occasioned the ceremony and of the wide circle of persons it affected.

When the sun was high in the heavens on this second day of the ceremony the beer was drunk, though it had not properly fermented. The old men poured some on the sacred stake while uttering a few words. I heard one of the maternal uncles say 'Nyakewa, we have no kinship with God. Thou hast kinship with him now. See, thy mother remains here; do not let the spirits trouble her.' Towards the end of the beer-drinking the people sang hymns to spirits of the air to the accompaniment of hand-clapping.

Later the waste products of the beer were heaped around the base of the stake on top of the tobacco leaves and millet heads and parts of the sacrificed beasts. The dead girl's ox-tassels, her horn spoon, her butter-gourd, and two lumps of tobacco were tied to the stake. These things were said to belong to God, for the girl's soul was now with God. They had become holy and could not be used by man. Finally the cooking stones and pots used in the beer-making were neatly arranged around the heap of offerings. I was told afterwards: 'Nyakewa has altogether departed from us who are men and has become Spirit (*kwoth*). Henceforward we will invoke her name in battle as we brandish our spears.' About a year after this ceremony kinsmen gather again at the shrine to drink beer and to sprinkle (*kith*) some of it into the air as an offering.

Sometimes a *colwic* spirit seizes a member of its family or lineage, in the same way as a spirit of the air may seize a man, and makes him sick. When he recovers he makes a small mound-shrine (*yik*) in his homestead and this then takes the place of the original shrine at the home of the person killed by lightning. Some of the dead person's ornaments may be inserted into the mound of the new shrine and others hung on the stake erected in it and on the low fence enclosing it.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

that the unity of twins is expressed, particularly in ceremonies connected with marriage and death, in which the personality undergoes a change. Thus, when the senior of male twins marries, the junior acts with him in the ritual acts he has to perform; female twins ought to be married on the same day; and no mortuary ceremonies are held for twins because, for one reason, one of them cannot be cut off from the living without the other. A woman whose twin brother had died some time before said to Miss Soule, to whom I am indebted for the information, 'Is not his soul still living? I am alive, and we are really children of God.'

There is no mortuary ceremony even when the second twin dies, and I was told that twins do not attend the mortuary ceremonies held for their dead kinsfolk, nor mourn them, because a twin is a *ran nhial*, a person of the sky or of the above. He is also spoken of as *gat kwoth*, a child of God. These dioscuric descriptions of twins are common to many peoples, but the Nuer are peculiar in holding also that they are birds. They say 'a twin is not a person (*ran*), he is a bird (*dit*)', although, as we have just seen, they assert, in another sense, that twins are one person (*ran*). Here they are using the word *ran* in the sense of a human being as distinct from any other creature. The dogma is expressed in various ways. Very often a twin is given the proper name *Dit*, bird, *Gwong*, guineafowl, or *Ngec*, francolin.[1] All Nuer consider it shameful, at any rate for adults, to eat any sort of bird or its eggs, but were a twin to do this it would be much more than shameful. It would be *nueer*, a grave sin, for twins respect (*thek*) birds, because, Nuer say, birds are also twins, and they avoid any sort of contact with them. The equivalence of twins and birds is expressed particularly in connexion with death. When an infant twin dies people say '*ce par*', 'he has flown away', using the word denoting the flight of birds. Infant twins who die, as so often happens, are not buried, as other infants are, but are covered in

[1] That the names, at least all those I have heard, are taken from birds lowest in the scale of Nuer reckoning requires comment, especially in view of the argument I later develop. It may be due to the Nuer habit of speaking of their relation to God—the birth of twins constitutes such a context—by comparing themselves with lowly things. On the other hand, it may be simply in keeping with the logic of the analogy. Twins belong to the class of the above but are below; just as guineafowl and francolin belong to the class of birds, which as a class is in the category of the above, but are almost earthbound.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

a reed basket or winnowing-tray and placed in the fork of a tree, because birds rest in trees. I was told that birds which feed on carrion would not molest the bodies but would look at their dead kinsmen—twins and birds are also said to be kin, though the usage may be regarded as metaphorical—and fly away again. When I asked a Nuer whether adult twins would be buried like other people he replied 'no, of course not, they are birds and their souls go up into the air'. A platform, not used in the normal mode of burial, is erected in the grave and a hide placed over it. The body is laid on this hide and covered with a second hide. Earth is then carefully patted over the upper hide instead of being shovelled in quickly, as in the burial of an ordinary person. I was told that the corpse is covered with earth lest a hyena eat it and afterwards drink at a pool, for men might drink at the same pool and die from contamination (*nueer*).

It is understandable that Nuer draw an analogy between the multiple hatching of eggs and the dual birth of twins. The analogy is explicit, and, through an extension of it, the flesh of crocodiles and turtles is also forbidden to twins on the ground that these creatures too, like birds, lay eggs. Miss Soule once had a girl twin in her household who refused fish for the same reason—the only case of its kind known to either of us. But the analogy between multiple births in birds and men does not adequately explain why it is with birds that human twins are equated when there are many other creatures which habitually bear several young at the same time and in a manner more closely resembling human parturition. It cannot be just multiple birth which leads Nuer to say that twins are birds, for these other creatures are not respected by twins on that account. The prohibition on eating eggs is clearly secondary, and it is extended to include crocodiles and turtles—and by Miss Soule's girl fish also—not because they lay eggs but because their laying eggs makes them like birds. Moreover, it is difficult to understand why a resemblance of the kind should in any case be made so much of. The multiple hatching of chicks is doubtless a resemblance which greatly strengthens the idea of twins being birds, but it is only part of a more complex analogical representation which requires to be explained in more general terms of Nuer religious thought. A twin, on account of his peculiar manner of conception is, though not Spirit himself, a special creation, and, therefore, manifestation of Spirit; and when he dies his

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

a suitable symbol in which to express the special relationship in which a twin stands to God. When, therefore, Nuer say that a twin is a bird they are not speaking of either as it appears in the flesh. They are speaking of the *anima* of the twin, what they call his *tie*, a concept which includes both what we call the personality and the soul; and they are speaking of the association birds have with Spirit through their ability to enter the realm to which Spirit is likened in metaphor and where Nuer think it chiefly is, or may be. The formula does not express a dyadic relationship between twins and birds but a triadic relationship between twins, birds, and God. In respect to God twins and birds have a similar character.

It is because Nuer do not make, or take, the statement that twins are birds in any ordinary sense that they are fully aware that in ritual relating to twins the actions are a kind of miming. This is shown in their treatment of the corpse of a twin, for, according to what they themselves say, what is a bird, the *tie* or *anima*, has gone up into the air and what is left and treated—in the case of adults platform burial being a convenient alternative to disposal in trees—as though it might be a bird is only the *ring*, the flesh. It is shown also in the convention that should one of a pair of twins die, the child who comes after them takes his place, counting as one of them in the various ceremonies twins have to perform and respecting birds as rigorously as if he were himself a twin, which he is not. The ceremonies have to be performed for the benefit of the living twin and their structure and purpose are such that there have to be two persons to perform them, so a brother or sister acts in the place of the dead.

This discussion of what is meant by the statement that a twin is a bird is not so far away from the subject of totemism as it might seem to be, for the stock explanation among the Nuer of a totemic relationship is that the ancestor of a lineage and a member of a natural species were born twins. The relationship of lineage to species is thereby made to derive not only from the closest of all possible relationships but also from a special act of divine revelation; and since the link between a lineage and its totem is the tutelary spirit of the lineage associated with the totem it is appropriate that the relationship should be thought of as having come about by an event which is a direct manifestation of Spirit.

However, an examination of the Nuer dogma that twins are

764 in front of the dead man's hut. He also addresses the ghost and
782 tells him that he has been taken away and must turn his face to the ground and not trouble the living: 'friend, this (beast) is yours (for you). Now turn yourself to the ghosts. Turn yourself away from us. Death was not made by us in old times, it was made by God, friend. Do not trouble your people with bad dreams but regard us favourably. God has not entirely destroyed you, for there are those who come after you; you have children left behind you.' If the family have no animal to sacrifice the master of ceremonies sacrifices by cutting in two a wild cucumber. 'The half of the living, the half of the children, the right half, remains outside, being placed in the thatch of the hut. The half of the dead man is thrown into the bush.' With it is thrown out of the village the contagion of death. They say of this sacrifice '*ba kier piny ka del*', '(the dead man) is expiated in the earth with a goat', and that the badness goes into the earth with the blood and the chyme.

765 Members of the family mourn till the mortuary ceremony has been held some months after death. They shave their heads after the burial but then they do not shave them again, neither do they treat the hair with ashes nor depilate their bodies, till the period of mourning is ended. They also remove all ornaments, and the closest relatives wear a *dep liath*, a mourning cord of grass, around their waists and necks. There are no prescribed food and sex abstentions during the period of mourning though I was told that close kin may abstain from sexual relations for a few days after death 'because they are sad and thinking of their dead friend'. Less closely related persons and the wives of kin show their respect by leaving their hair untended but for a shorter time, perhaps only a month or so. When people are in mourning they do not attend dances. People do not mourn for a small child, for
[858] 'a small child is not a person (*ran*). When he tethers the cattle and herds the goats he is a person. When he cleans the byres and spreads the dung out to dry and collects it and carries it to the fires he is a person.' A man will not say that he has a son till the
[766] child is about six years of age. A small child is buried by old women and without sacrifice.

765 Four to six months after burial the mortuary ceremony is held.
775 It is known as *wocene cuol* or *cuol woc* because its purpose is to wipe out (*woc*) the debt (*cuol*) which Nuer feel to be due on account of the death. They seem to feel that there is some mis-

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

to refer to other persons with traditional ritual functions, such as the *wut ghok* or man of the cattle, though this usage is loose and should perhaps be regarded as derived by analogy from its primary use to denote a leopard-skin priest. When the Government chose certain leading persons in the various Nuer communities and appointed them 'Government Chiefs' with administrative and judicial duties and privileges these chiefs became known as *kuar biei*, chiefs of the cloth (the robes of office presented to them by the Government), either because Europeans referred to them as *kuar* or because Nuer saw a resemblance between the robes and the leopard-skins worn by priests. Both are worn over the right shoulder. *Kuaar* became as well the title by which Europeans are addressed by Nuer, perhaps for one or other of the same reasons. The word has thus gained a wider range of meaning.

A more usual title than *kuaar twac* or *gwan twac* is *kuaar muon*, priest of the earth, the word *mun* (gen. *muon*) meaning 'earth' in the sense of 'soil'; and if it were not that in the literature on the Nuer the priest of whom we speak is always designated by reference to his leopard-skin I should be inclined to write of him as the priest of the earth, because the leopard-skin title is taken only from his badge whereas the earth title is derived from a symbolic association with the earth of deeper significance. It is said that a leopard-skin priest (henceforward generally referred to simply as 'priest') will not approach people when they are making pots lest the pots crack; and in this sense he may be said to respect (*thek*) the earth. If anything goes wrong with the standing crops he may be asked to anoint (*yir*) the earth with butter. He may also be asked to anoint seed and digging-sticks with butter before sowing. When a priest is buried, his corpse, so that it will not be in contact with the earth, is placed between hides on a light platform erected in the grave, which is dug in his hut if he dies while the people are in their villages. These and other observances express a mystical relationship of priests with the earth in virtue of which their curses are thought to have special potency, for, as was noted earlier (p. 167), they can affect not only a man's crops but his welfare generally, since human activities all take place on the earth. However, in spite of the power attributed to their curses, I have never known Nuer stand in awe of them nor have I known the power to be used outside a situation of feud; and then a priest's threat to curse is regarded as a routine convention. It gives the

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

case of the leopard-skin priestly lineages, any member of a lineage of men of the cattle can perform the services attached to that office, but in practice only some, and senior, persons would normally be called upon to do so. These services have less religious and social importance than those of the *kuaar muon*, and a man of the cattle is not by virtue of his office a person of social importance. One hears of him chiefly in connexion with his ability to perform rites to cure sick beasts and to make barren cows fertile, usually by spitting on grass and beating the animal's back with it while asking God to make the beasts well or fertile. In times of murrain he may sacrifice an ox to God. I was told that after consecrating it he would speak in this vein: 'What, God? Take this ox, it is thine. Thou art master of the world, the world is thine and it is thine affair alone. What, God? Do not kill all the cattle. What will our children eat? No one will live. Oh God, take thy cow and spare a portion of the herds. God, I am a man of the cattle and I have come to sacrifice this beast; take it, it is thine.' Nuer say that he addresses '*kwothde*', 'his spirit', that is Spirit as figured in relation to his office, the God of his fathers. He may also on raids lash a tethering-cord in the direction of enemy herds to ensure booty. He may be consulted about the time of moving to dry-season camps. He is said to sprinkle people with milk in time of sickness, and at his own mortuary ceremony his kinsmen and possessions are aspersed with milk. He is buried in fresh cattle manure. He cannot accept cattle in compensation for adultery with his wife. His curse can cause cattle to die and a man to have diarrhoea if he drinks milk. All these customs and notions give him that mystical association with cattle which is indicated by his title and also by his badge of office, a circle or two of tethering-cord round his neck.

As I have explained earlier (pp. 255–6), initiation of boys to manhood is intimately bound up with their relation to the cattle. It is therefore appropriate that it should be a man of the cattle who in each tribe determines when a new age-set should commence and when it should close, performs sacrifices to open and close the periods of initiation, and names the sets; and this is the most important public function of any man of the cattle. We see here again how, as in the cases of the masters of ceremonies and the leopard-skin priests, the chief religious function of men of the cattle, their formal sacrificial and ceremonial role, is concerned with group activities. In their case the activities are relations